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ABSTRACT

The success of an orientation leader depends upon three things: an understanding of the college, an understanding of the entering student, and an ability to communicate and empathize. The purpose of this report is to examine the psychological world of the new student through the words he uses, the meaning they hold for him, and the impact they have on his behavior. A semantic differential was administered to a random sample of 103 members of the entering freshman class of the State University College at Oswego during the 1970 summer orientation program. Each participant rated 12 of the concepts on 6 scales, 2 evaluative, 2 potency, and 2 activity. These scales were so arranged that a subject could choose any one of 7 steps between the extremes. The results for each concept were averaged to yield 3 scores that would serve to locate the point in a semantic space for the total entering freshman class, and for males and females separately. The concepts were grouped in 4 clusters: (1) persons; (2) college; (3) social change; and (4) the future. (AF)

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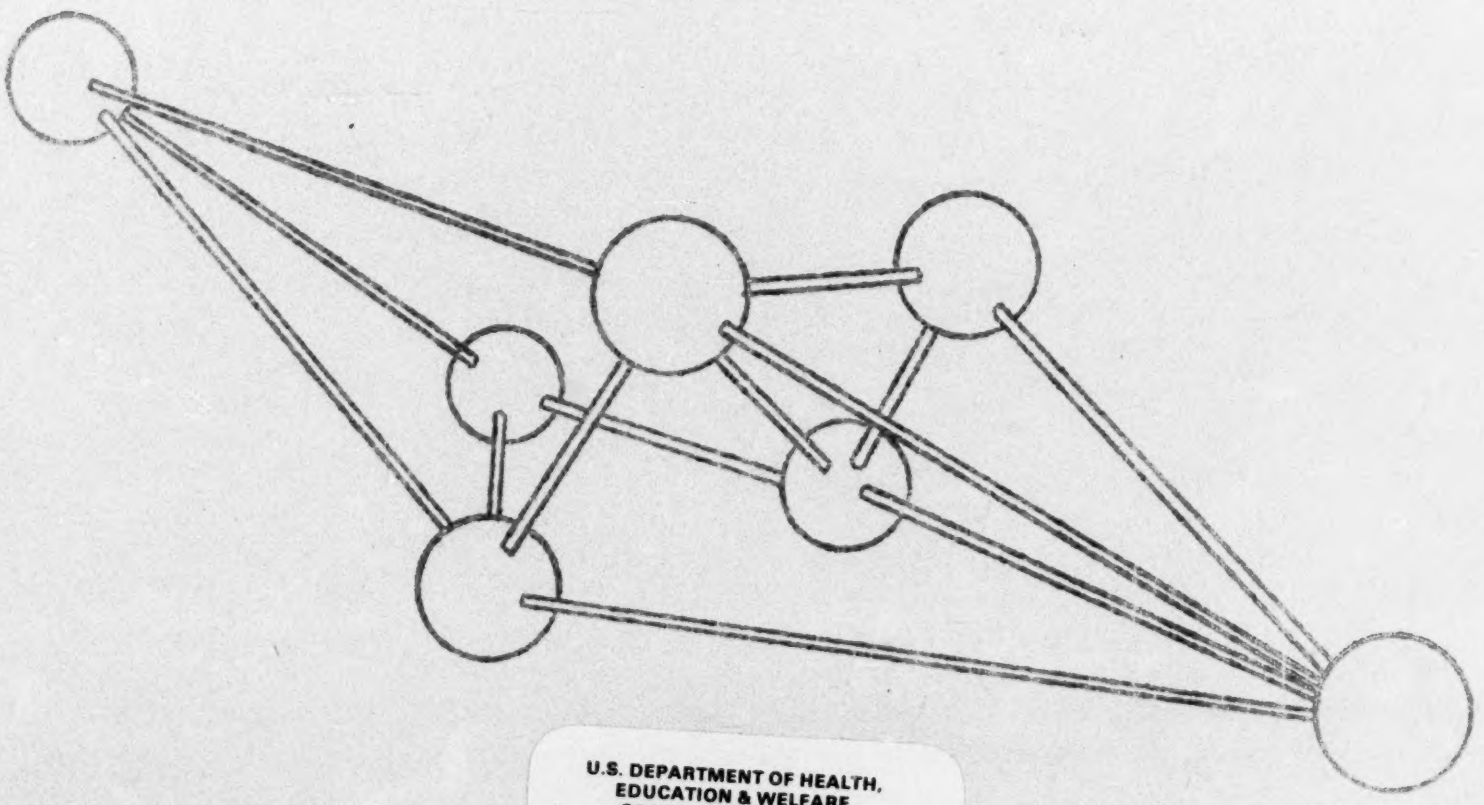
THE ENTERING FRESHMAN: A STUDENT FOR THE 70's

S.O.S. II

"MEN CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH THE SAME WORDS AS OTHER PEOPLE USE, AS IF THE VERY SOUND NECESSARILY CARRIED THE SAME MEANING." - Locke



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PREPARED FOR THE THIRD CURRICULUM COORDINATING COMMITTEE

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT OSWEGO

BY

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ASSISTANT DEAN OF STUDENTS

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Success as an orientation leader, whether the leader is an Orientation Guide, Resident Assistant, Faculty member, or student personnel worker, is dependent upon three things: an understanding of the college, and understanding of the entering student, and the ability to communicate and to empathize. If the person who wants to work with incoming students is deficient in any of these three areas, it is unlikely that he will be effective in helping freshmen make a smooth transition to campus life and avail themselves of the opportunities for personal growth that are part of the college environment.

Certainly the orientation leader must understand the "college scene" in general and his own campus inparticular. He must be able to tell the new student about the campus, the people, and the curriculum. He must know how much spending money is needed, where to buy textbooks, how to join a fraternity or sorority, how to find a ride to Boston, or where to get financial aid. In short, the orientation leader must be expert in everything from men's rooms to metriculation. Fortunately, the orientation leader has, almost invariably, real knowledge about the institution. To begin with, he has all of the catalogues, handbooks, memos, and pamphlets the college has to offer. He has been subjected to lectures and discussions. Most importantly, he has survived at least a year on campus himself and can relate his experiences, successes, and failures to the new student. The orientation leader is usually more than adequately prepared to provide the entering student with the kinds of information he needs to make good choices during his first few days and weeks on campus.

All of this information is of little use to the orientation leader if he does not know how to communicate it to others. He must know what new students want to know and be able to express himself clearly and succinctly. Above all the orientation leader must care about the entering student. He must have personal stake in the individual freshman's success both as a student and a person. With these qualities the new student will probably seek him out and make the best use of the information and experience he has to offer.

While there is no guarantee that each orientation leader has these personal qualities all have been subjected to some kind of a selection process designed to eliminate the inarticulate, the insensitive, and the egotist. Each person involved with freshmen has impressed someone with his ability to relate to others in an articulate and empathetic way and with his keen interest in the orientation process. Therefore, each person involved in the orientation program probably has invaluable knowledge and experience that he can successfully communicate in ways that will help the campus novice make choices consistent with his needs and the realities of college life.

Even after the first two criteria have been met, a third still looms on the horizon. The orientation leader must understand the entering student. It is very difficult to develop and communicate information to entering freshmen, if the nature of the recipient is not known. It is difficult to know what is important to say or do, if the needs of the entering student are unknown. In fact, it is impossible to know where you are going, if you do not know where you are starting from and, for the orientation leader, the starting point must be the new student: his prior experience, his hopes, his expectations, and himself.

Here there are no catalogues or handbooks to provide information. Even the orientation leader's experience is suspect. He can try to look back over his past and imagine what he felt like on his first day on campus, but time dims those memories and the strong emotions and feelings of yesterday seem like silly, inconsequential impulses today. Further, the orientation leader is not a typical student. He has chosen to assume a role most others do not desire. He has passed through a rigorous selection process. He has thought, studied, read, and discussed things that the typical student has passed over. There is little to indicate that this select person's recollections are an accurate guide to understanding the typical entering student. Still, the orientation leader must have some ideas to guide him in his new role.

The purpose of this report is to introduce the entering freshman in a new way - to strip away long hair, hometowns, mini-skirts, and high schools. This report is an attempt to examine the psychological world of the new student through the words he uses, the meaning they hold for him, and the impact they have on his behavior. By examining the critical concepts a freshman holds and the way these concepts are related, the orientation leader can have a new campus map to guide him. Certainly the map, like any other, is only a rough sketch of the territory it depicts, none of the beauty of the countryside appears, none of the confusing detours are shown, but by studying words and the meaning they hold for the entering student, the orientation leader can begin to understand the reality of the entering student's world.

If, as Snygg and Coombs (1959:384) have stated, education is truly a matter of helping people to know and to behave differently as a result of their knowing, then this report is the raw material from which orientation leaders can help new students to construct new meanings. Most orientation leaders will not fail because they lack information about the college or cannot communicate this information in a coherent way; they will fail because they cannot adequately deal with the question of: "how can I do a better job of effecting the meanings of entering students?"

As everyone knows, words mean different things to different people. Dictionary definitions are pale snapshots of powerful concepts. Lok at these from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1967):

war:	a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations.
pollution:	to make physically impure or unclean.
marihuana:	the dried leaves and flowering tops of the postillate hemp plant that yield cannabin and are sometimes smoked in cigarettes for their intoxicating effect.
mother:	a female parent.

None of these definitions would make people angry or frightened, but the words themselves do. The deep feeling held about war, pollution, marihuana, or mother, help to

create Kent States, Woodstock, or Chicago. The deep personal feelings about mother can be related to leadership or homosexuality. These deeper meanings tell a great deal about the user and the world he perceives about him. Snygg and Coombs (1949) make it clear that each person or sub-group of persons lives in his own world - his own reality. He feels and behaves in terms of this personal world. It is reality for him. If the orientation leader understands the world of the freshman, then he can understand his feelings and behavior. With this understanding, coupled with good information and empathy, he can make a difference in future of the entering student.

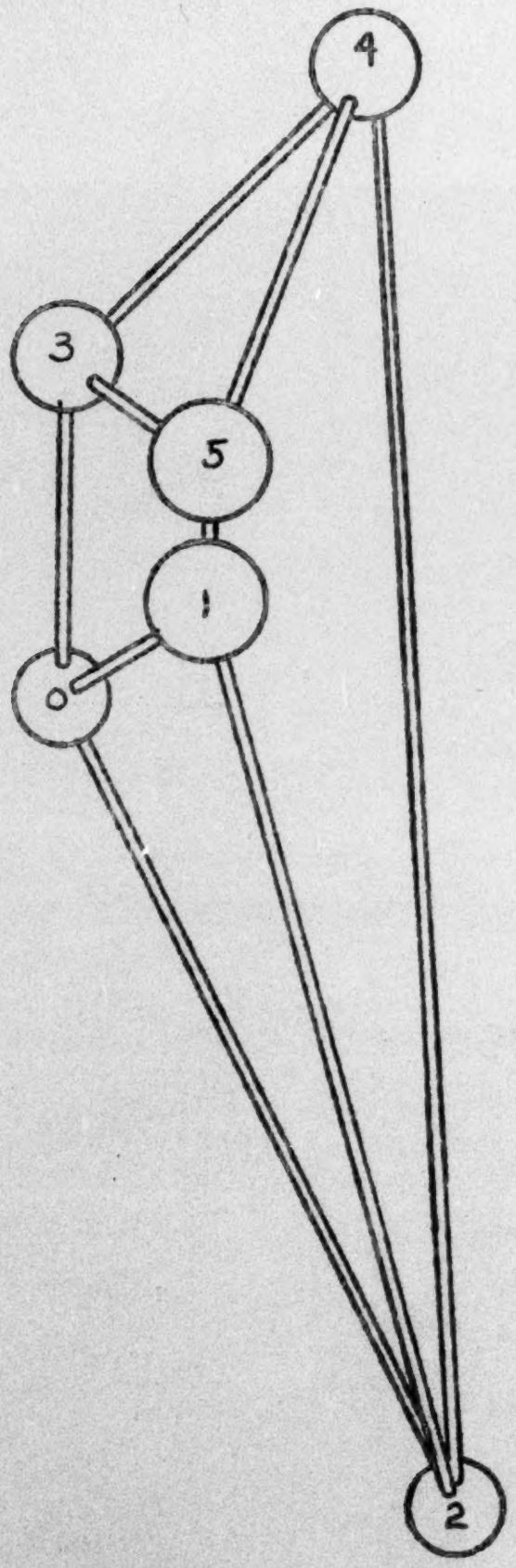
THE S.O.S. II

Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) were among the first to explore the meaning of words as a map of personal reality. They developed a questionnaire, the Semantic Differential, based upon the fact that individuals react to words and concepts in three major ways. Persons judge the concept in terms of its goodness or badness, its strength or weakness, and its activity or passivity. When a concept's position on each of these three dimensions, evaluative, potency, and activity, are known the concept can be placed in a kind of three diumensional space. The placement of the term in this space tells a good deal about its meaning to the respondent and when several concepts are placed in the same space, the distance between them and the patterns they form give clues to their similarity or difference for the respondent. These similarities may have little to do with the cognitive or rational definition of the term, but they are related to the respondent's deeper personal reality. For example, if a freshman indicated that MY FATHER and PROFESSOR had similar positions in his semantic space, it would tend to indicate that he would react to them in similar ways with similar expectations.

It is possible to represent this space in a model or sketch that will facilitate interpretation. Spheres represent the concepts and sticks represent the distance between concepts. Here, for example, is the way one freshman girl sees the terms: DEAN (1), FAILURE (2), MYSELF (3), MY FATHER (4), and MY MOTHER (5) a sixth term representing neutrality (0) is always included to facilitate interpretation. (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

A Representation of the Semantic Space of a Female Education Major



As can be seen in FIGURE 1, this student sees DEAN, MYSELF, and MY MOTHER in rather similar, but somewhat neutral terms. MY FATHER is much less neutral and located far from FAILURE. She reacts to MYSELF in ways more similar to MY MOTHER rather than MY FATHER and perceives the DEAN AS MORE like MY MOTHER and MYSELF than MY FATHER. This map provides real clues to the personality and perceptual world of the subject.

A semantic differential consisting of thirty concepts relevant to college life was administered to a random sample of 103 members of the entering freshmen class during the summer 1970 orientation program. Each participant rated twelve of the concepts on six scales, two evaluative (good-bad, pleasurable-painful), two potency (strong-weak, hard-soft), and two activity (active-passive, moving-still). These scales were arranged so that a subject could choose any one of seven steps between the extremes. The results for each concept were averaged to yield three scores that would serve to locate the point in a semantic space for the total entering freshmen class and for males and females separately. In order to simplify the interpretation of the results , the concepts were grouped in logical clusters as indicated in TABLE 1.

Since Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) also indicate that the evaluative dimension serves as an adequate attitude scale, an analysis on the means of students grouped by sex and by division was conducted to determine whether attitude differences existed among these concepts.

TABLE 1

Concepts Studied and Concept Clusters

Cluster #1 Persons		Cluster #2 - College	
5	College Student	1	An Educated Person
7	Dean	3	Books
11	High School Principal	9	Education
12	High School Student	24	Reading
13	High School Teacher	26	Studying
19	My Mother	27	S.U.C.O.
20	My Father	30	Writing
21	Myself		
23	Professor		

Cluster #3 - Social Change		Cluster #4 - The Future	
2	Black Power	6	Dating
4	Cambodian Invasion	10	Failure
8	Drugs	16	Marriage
14	Kent State	17	Money
15	Marihuana	18	My Career
22	Premarital Sex	28	Success
25	Student Radicals	29	The Future

In every instance the semantic space is drawn to the same scale from the perspective. Numbers are used to identify concepts throughout the diagrams in order to conserve space and to prevent cluttering.

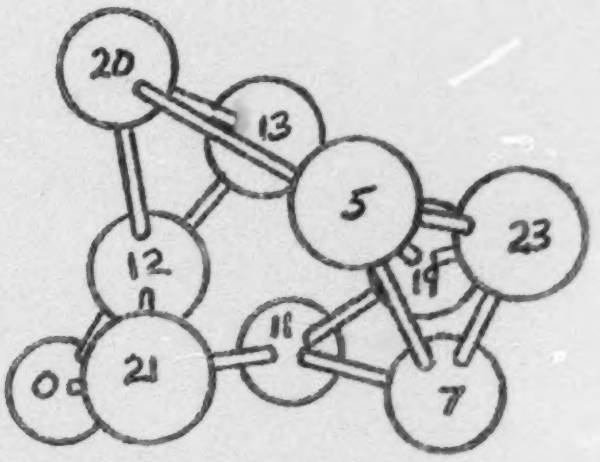
THE RESULTS

HOW DO ENTERING STUDENTS PERCEIVE SIGNIFICANTLY OR POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT PERSONS? (Cluster #1)

Generally, this is a rather tight cluster of concepts (See FIGURE 2). Most of the persons are perceived as being good, potent, and active. Two rather striking groups are in evidence. The concepts of COLLEGE STUDENT (5), DEAN (7), MY FATHER (19), and PROFESSOR (23) occupy

FIGURE 2

A representation of the Semantic Space for Total Freshmen Class for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #1 - Persons



rather similar positions in space and probably elicit similar reactions. The centrality of MY FATHER (19) here is of particular interest, since it implies some kind of unconscious in loco parentis with an emphasis on the authoritarian aspects of that role. A second group of interest is HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT (12), MYSELF (21), and neutrality (0).

It would be expected that the orientation process would help the entering student move his concept of MYSELF (21) away from HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT (12) and neutrality (0) toward COLLEGE

STUDENT (5). Other kinds of shifts in meaning (eg. COLLEGE STUDENT (5) toward MYSELF (21) and HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT (12)) would seem less desirable. It is also interesting to note the rather neutral position between MY MOTHER (20) and COLLEGE STUDENT (5) occupied by HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER (13). HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL (11) is apparently an isolated term as is MY MOTHER (20).

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY IN WHICH MALES AND FEMALES ORGANIZE THE TERMS IN CLUSTER #1-PERSONS?

There are several striking differences between the Cluster #1 (FIGURE 3) concepts for men and women. Men see MYSELF (21) as being most closely related to neutrality (0) and MY MOTHER (20), while women see this term as being most closely related to HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT (1). Men see MYSELF (21) as much more closely related to COLLEGE STUDENT (5) than do women. In the male space the concepts PROFESSOR (23), DEAN (7), MY FATHER (19), and to a certain extent, HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL (11) form a tight cluster of terms with similar meanings. No such group exists among women. The women tend to differentiate among these concepts more clearly. It is interesting to note that women tend to see MY MOTHER (20) and MY FATHER (19) as more closely related than do men.

The implications in these data for orientation leaders are:

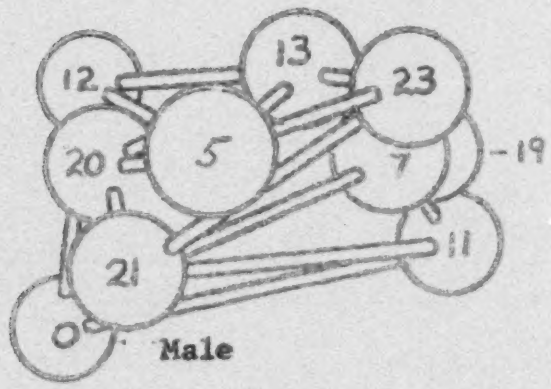
a. Men are more likely to react to campus figure in terms of <u>in loco parentis</u> than are women.

b. Women are more apt to regard themselves as high school students than are men.

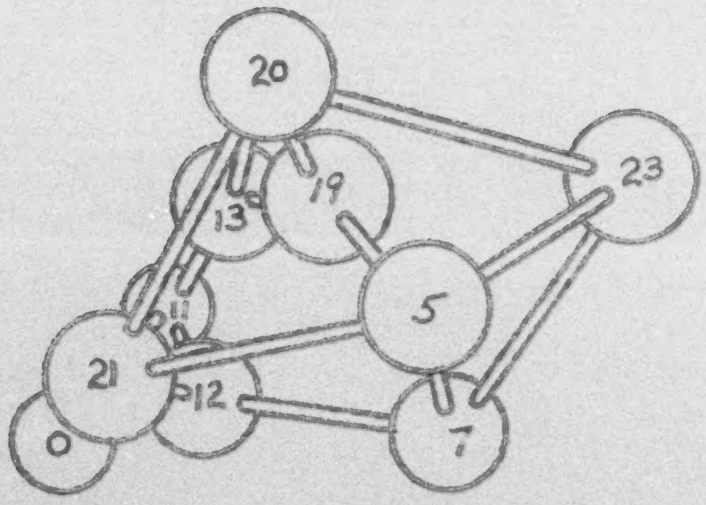
c. Women are more likely to be closer to their fathers than are men.

FIGURE 3

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Males and Females for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #1 - Persons



Male

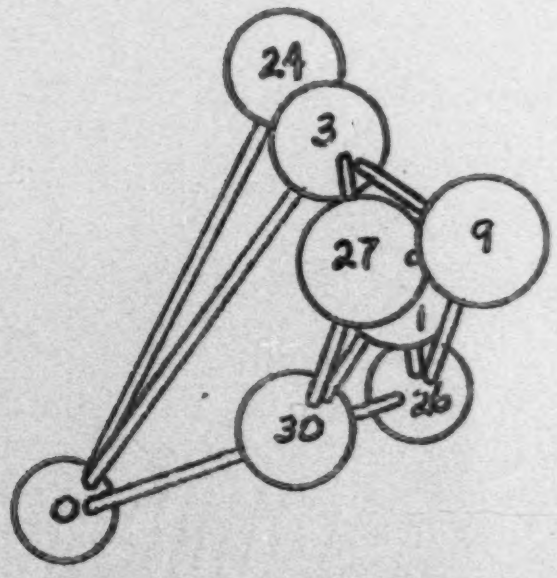


Female

3. HOW DO ENTERING STUDENTS PERCEIVE TERMS RELATED TO ACADEMIC LIFE? (Cluster #2) These terms are not differentiated very well. (FIGURE 4). All, however, are quite meaningful. One particularly noticeable group is made of AN EDUCATED PERSON (1), EDUCATION (9), STUDYING (26), and STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT OSWEGO (27). It is interesting to note that READING (24) and BOOKS (3), both highly valued concepts, are not a part of this group. It is also interesting to observe the great difference between READING (24) and WRITING (30) and READING (24) and STUDYING (26). To bring these terms more closely together [STUDYING (26) and WRITING (30) toward READING (24) and BOOKS (3)] could be a fruitful goal for the orientation process. Certainly this dissimilarity has implications for the professor.

FIGURE 4

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Total Freshmen Class for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #2 - College



4. ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY MEN AND WOMEN PERCEIVE CONCEPTS RELATED TO ACADEMIC LIFE?

While the shape of the semantic space (FIGURE 5) is somewhat different for men and women, the information contained in the model is rather similar. While both sexes have a group of terms that include: AN EDUCATED PERSON (1), STUDYING (26), STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT OSWEGO (27), and WRITING (30), men included the term BOOKS (3) in the group while women included the term EDUCATION (9). It is also interesting to note that men tend to associate BOOKS (3) with STUDYING (26), while women tend to associate it with READING (24).

The implication of these finds are relatively clear:

a. It would be desirable to move the meaning of the academic group of terms AN EDUCATED PERSON (1), STUDYING (26), STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT OSWEGO (27), and WRITING (30) closer to the term READING (24) for both sexes.

b. It would be desirable to move the academic group of terms toward the concept of EDUCATION (9) for men.

c. It would be desirable to move the concept of BOOKS (3) and STUDYING (26) closer to the term READING (24) for men.

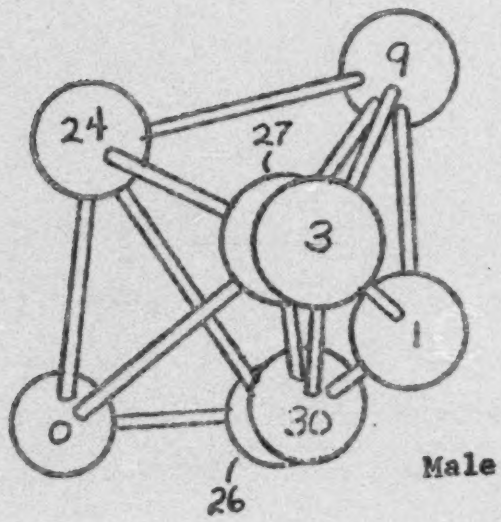
The terms of this cluster are all perceived as being meaningful by students, but might be expected STUDYING (26) and WRITING (30 are not as pleasurable as READING (30). If they could be shifted toward more pleasurable terms, it would be a positive step toward helping entering students make their total academic career more enjoyable and more successful.

5. HOW DO ENTERING STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE CONCEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL CHANGE AND FERMENT? (Cluster #3)

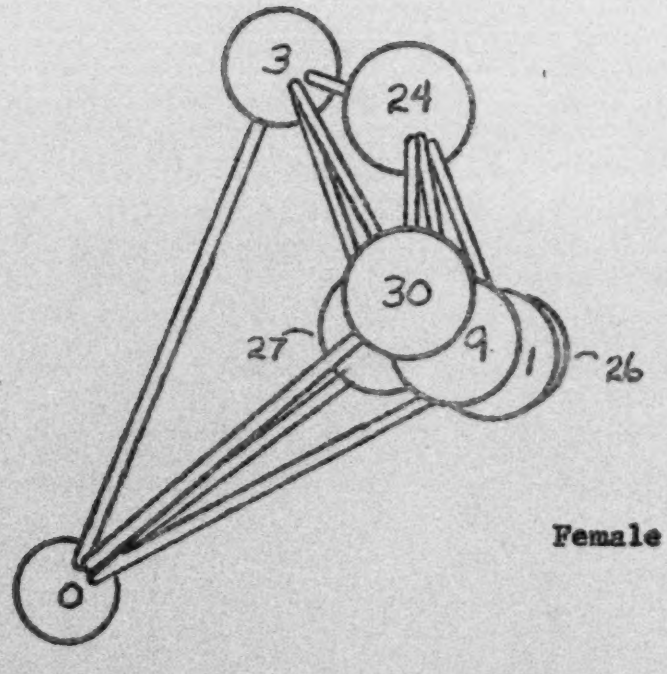
This is a difficult cluster (FIGURE #6) to interpret since the terms are not closely related. BLACK POWER (2) and STUDENT RADICALS (25) are perceived in somewhat similar terms, as are DRUGS (8) and MARIHAUNA (15). PREMARITAL SEX (22) is a rather neutral (0) term. This cluster contains the most meaningful term, KENT STATE (14). This concept is frightening

FIGURE 5

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Males and Females for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #2 - College



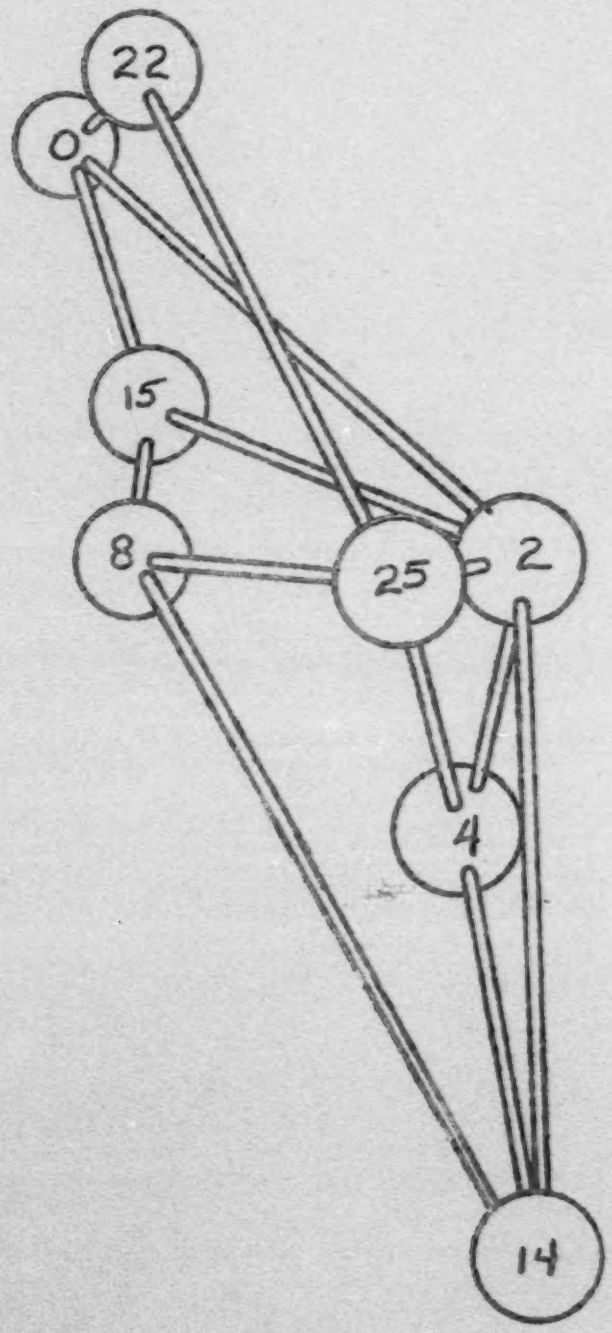
Male



Female

FIGURE 6

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Total Freshmen Class for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #3 - Social Change



for most entering students and is much more salient than the related CAMBODIAN INVASION (4). There are few implications here for orientation leaders since the terms are so spread in the semantic space. Perhaps some effort can be made to reduce the fear elicited by KENT STATE (14), but essentially attempting to shift concepts in this cluster makes little sense.

6. ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY IN WHICH MEN AND WOMEN PERCEIVE THE CONCEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL CHANGE AND FERMENT?

The semantic space (FIGURE 7) of entering men and women are essentially similar. The women tend to see all of the concepts as being somewhat more differentiated, but with only a few exceptions, the relative positions occupied by the concepts are similar. As might be expected women see the term PREMARITAL SEX (33) as less neutral than do men. Men also perceive it as similar to the terms DRUGS (8) and MARIHAUNA (15), while women place these latter concepts differently. Aside from these differences the semantic profiles of the two sexes are similar and are not inconsistent with an essentially moderate student body that can be aroused by a KENT STATE (14) or CAMBODIAN INVASION (4).

7. HOW DO ENTERING STUDENTS PERCEIVE CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE FUTURE? (Cluster #4)

These concepts are rather clearly differentiated from a neutral (0) position. A rather striking froup of concepts, MARRIAGE (16), MONEY (17), MY CAREER (18), and success (28) is apparent. (FIGURE8) While DATING (6) is related to this group, it is not clearly a part of it. It is interesting to speculate that DATING (6) might be perceived as a means to an end. A second interesting observation is the placement of the concept THE FUTURE (29). This rather ambiguous term is hardly neutral (0) and is apparently more closely related to FAILURE (10) than SUCCESS (28). This pessimism might be a fruitful area for exploration by orientation leaders and, while perhaps not corresponding to

FIGURE 7

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Males and Females for the Concepts contained in Cluster #3 -Social Change

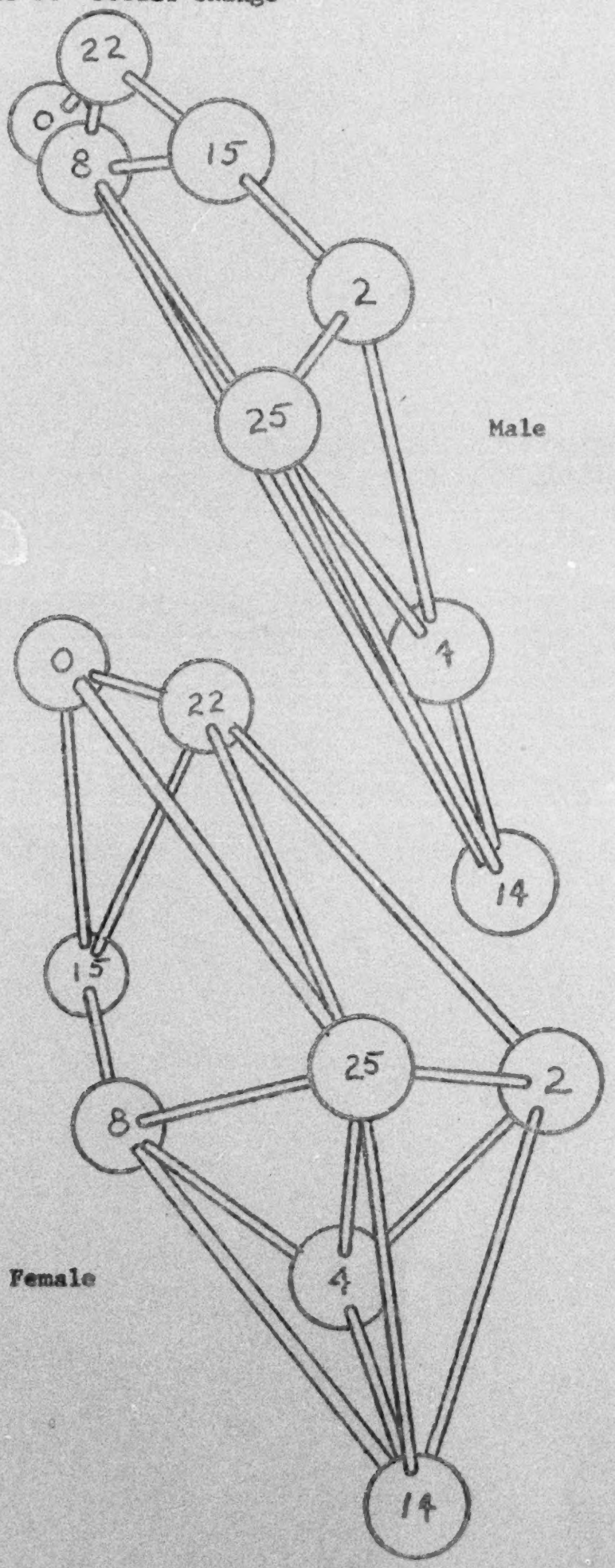
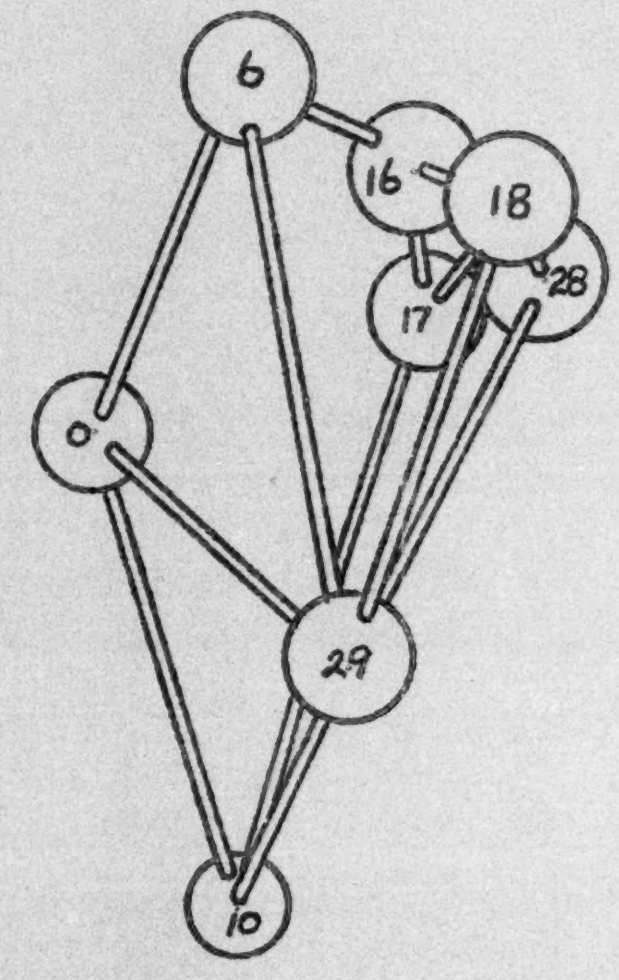


FIGURE 8

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Total Freshmen Class for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #4 - The Future



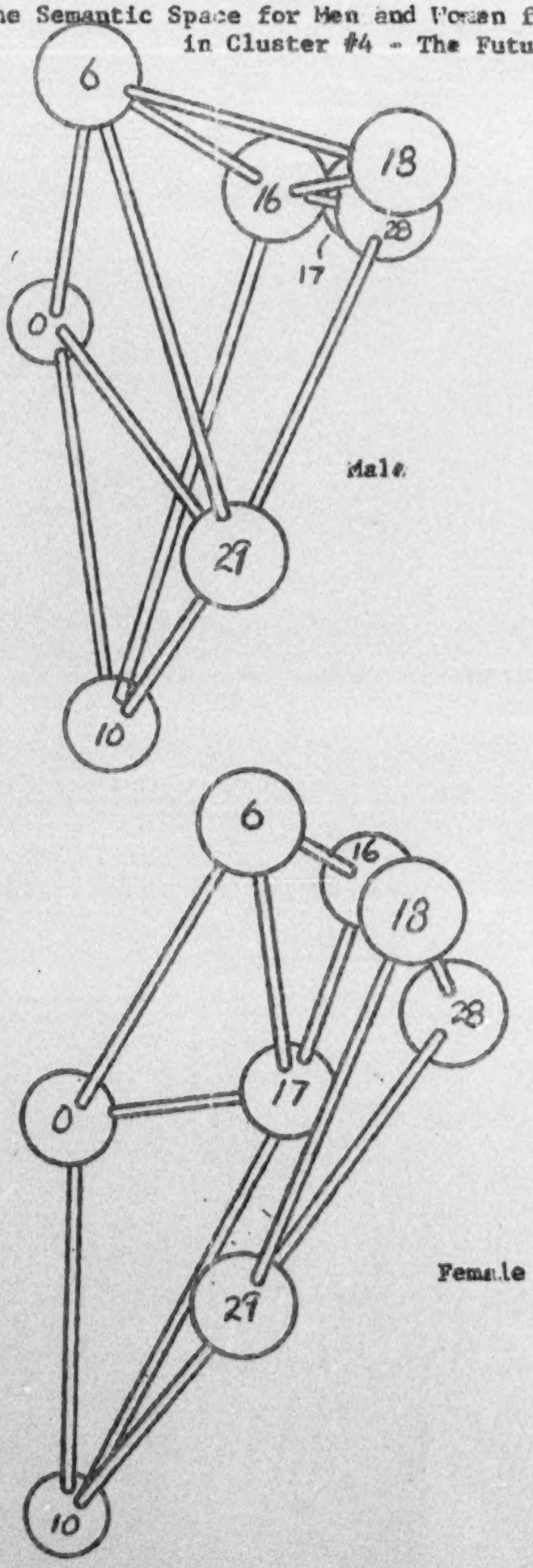
reality, some effort to shift THE FUTURE (29) toward the MARRIAGE (16), MONEY (L&), MY CAREER (18), SUCCESS (28) group would help entering students to reduce some of the frustration they probably feel.

8. HOW DO MEN AND WOMEN DIFFER IN THE WAY THEY PERCEIVE CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE FUTURE?

While the basic shape of the cluster (FIGURE 9) is not different for men and women, there are two concepts that occupy strikingly different positions. For men the term MONEY (17) is closely connected with the

FIGURE 9

A Representation of the Semantic Space for Men and Women for the Concepts Contained in Cluster #4 - The Future



concepts MY CAREER (18), SUCCESS (28), and MARRIAGE (16), for women the concept is relatively isolated. On the other hand, women relate the concept of DATING (6) more closely to MARRIAGE (16) than do men. Other than the differences in these concepts the patterns of men and women are essentially similar.

HAT ARE THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS THE CONCEPTS PRESENTED IN THE S.O.S II?

Osgood, Suci, and Taunenbaum (1957) define attitude in the following manner:

> [Attitudes] are predispositions to respond, but are distinguished from other such states of readiness in that they predispose toward an evaluative response. Thus, attitudes are referred to as "tendencies of approach or avoidance", or as "favorable or unfavorable". p. 189

Thus the evaluative dimension of the semantic differential can be used as an attitude scale to rank the concepts on the S.O.S II from most desirable to least desirable. TABLE 2 presents the concepts ranked in this manner.

In general, the most favorable concepts are those traditionally associated with higher education and the collegiate way of life. Students are favorable disposed toward DATING (6), READING (24), MY CAREER (18), and EDUCATION (9). More radical concepts, such as BLACK POWER (2), DRUGS (8), and STUDENT RADICALS (25), fare rather badly by comparison. The picture is one of a traditionally oriented freshmen class with few radical overtones.

E THERE DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES EXPRESSED BY MEN AND WOMEN TO THE CONCEPTS I S.O.S. II?

The chances are less than one in ten thousand that degree of similarity of the ranked lists (TABLE 2) is due to chance alone. There is considerable similarity between such terms as DATING (6), READING (24),

TABLE 2

Concepts Ranked by Attitude from Most Favorable for the Total Sample of Entering Students and by Sex

Total Sample	Male	Female
Most Favorable	Most Favorable	Most Favorable
/	/	/
Dating	Dating	Reading
Reading	Education	Books
My Career	My Career	My Career
Education	Reading	Dating
Books	S.U.C.O.	My Mother
S.U.C.O.	Books	Writing
An Educated Person	College Student	Education
Marriage	An Educated Person	Marriage
College Student	Success	S.U.C.O.
My Mother	Premarital Sex	An Educated Person
Professor	Marriage	My Father
Success	High School Teacher	Professor
High School Teacher	Professor	College Student
My Father	Money	Success
Money	High School Student	Hich School Teacher
Writing	Myself	Studying
Myself	My Mother	Myself
High School Student	Dean	Money
Dean	My Father	Dean
Premarital Sex	Marihauna	High School Student
Studying	Writing	The Future
The Future	Drugs	Premarital Sex
High School Principal	Black Power	High School Principal
Student Radicals	Studying	Student Radicals
Black Power	The Future	Black Power
Marihauna	High School Principal	Drugs
Drugs	Student Radicals	Cambodian Invasion
Cambodian Invasion	Cambodian Invasion	Marihauna
Failure	Failure	Failure
Kent State	Kent State	Kent State
/	/	/
Least Favorable	Least Favorable	Least Favorable

MY CAREER (18), EDUCATION (9), and BOOKS (3). There is also agreement between the sexes that KENT STATE (14), FAILURE (10), CAMBODIAN INVASION (4), and DRUGS (8) are unfavorable. The greatest amount of disagreement exists between the terms WRITING (30), PREMARITAL SEX (22), MY MOTHER (20), MARIHAUNA (15), MY FATHER (19), and STUDYING (26). As an inspection of TABLE 2 will indicate these differences are in the directions that might have been expected. On the whole, however, men and women hold similar attitudes towards the terms presented in the S.O.S. II.

Conclusions

The S.O.S. II provides members of the orientation team, for the first time, with real information about the world as seen by the incoming student. While none of the information contained in this report can be considered applicable to any specific individual, it can provide a starting point for planning for and communicating with freshmen. It can be useful as a starting point for dealing with groups; however, many of the students who will arrive in September deviate from these generalizations and personal contact with individual students must be the essential part of the process of understanding.

Still, we have learned many useful things from the data supplied by entering students. We have data now to substantiate that:

1. Students entering Oswego are, in general, rather traditional in their orientation toward college. They value education, books, reading and dating. They see dating as a means to marriage and marriage is closely tied to success, money and a career. If this is the "middle class ethic", so be it. These are important concepts to freshmen in general.

2. Students entering Oswego, in general, value the people with whom they come into contact. They tend to see teachers, professors, Deans,

students, and parents are rather closely related and as positive. None of these figures are, of course, infallible, but they are valued. If a generation gap exists, the data presented here indicated that its effect can be mitigated by an effort to bridge a "people gap". Persons associated with the college are seen as closer to parents than their high school counterparts, raising real questions about the nature of in loco parentis. Is it a real problem or is it based upon self-fulfilling expectations on the part of students and, perhaps, college personnel. The difficulty is not without its compensations though, for parents are rather desirable people to be like in the eyes of entering students, particularly women.

3. More radical concepts are not as well regarded by entering students as are more traditional ones. Both men and women expressed extremely negative reactions to Kent State and the Cambodian Invasion, but tend to tie these concepts like Student Radicals, Black Power, and Drugs. This is not to imply that entering students see these terms as closely related or that a specific event like Kent State could not radicalize them, but that this radicalization would be difficult to sustain in conflict with the more traditional values.

4. Men and women tend to order their perceptual world in similar ways. While this report has tended to emphasize the differences between the sexes the overall patterns of arrangement are strikingly different. Concepts tend to be judged in the same way by both sexes. Women are inclined to be more positive in their attitudes toward scholarly drudgery than men and more negative toward drugs and premarital sex, but even in these areas the similarities are striking.

The data contained in this report, hopefully, will raise more questions than they answer and the reader who studies the semantic maps will be able to find other, perhaps more

interesting, routes to guide him in his understanding of freshmen. By combining this information with his knowledge and skill in communication, he can help entering students change their world to conform to their needs and to reality. Obviously, these meanings will not be shifted by telling people to change them, education by force has never really worked, but with skill, knowledge, empathy, and a bit of luck the Orientation Leader, be he Orientation Guide, Resident Assistant, Professor, or Student Personnel Worker, can help the entering student mold his needs and the college environment into a personal reality that will produce growth and satisfaction. What more could be asked?

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